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ABSTRACT

This portrait of a high school literature classroom is one of a series of several such portraits which depict diverse classroom settings of high school literature, and which result from the second year of a teacher-research project in the greater Albany, New York area. This article portrays teacher Tony Carrera and his sophomore honors English class in a small rural school, as he experiments with a lesson to see how far students can get with little direct teacher intervention, given a fairly well-defined structure within which to work. (SR)

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Center for the Learning & Teaching of Literature

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Voices Making Meaning:
Reading the Texts with Tony Carrera

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Report Series 2.14

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Center-sponsored research falls into three broad areas: 1) surveys of current practice in the teaching of literature, including studies of both what is taught and how it is taught; 2) studies of alternative approaches to instruction and their effects on students' knowledge of literature and critical-thinking abilities; and 3) studies of alternative approaches to the assessment of literature achievement, including both classroom-based and larger-scale approaches to testing.

The Center also promotes good practice in the teaching of literature through conferences and seminars, through the development of computerized bibliographies on research and practice in the teaching of literature, and through publications that present the Center's own research and provide other resources for research and practice. To receive a list of current publications, please write to CLTL, School of Education, University at Albany, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222.

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Preface

Reading Teacher's Stories

The following portrait of high school literature classrooms results from the second year of a teacher-research project, sponsored by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature, concerned with depicting diverse classroom settings of high school literature instruction. Last year's report, "Teaching Literature in High School: A Teacher-Research Project" (Report Series 2.2, April, 1989) offered extensive detail about the goals and methods of our work, along with an explanation of the philosophical assumptions associated with it. We refer interested readers to that essay, and to the teacher narratives that it introduces, all available from the Center, for a fuller understanding of what we will summarize only cursorily here. The narratives that have been produced this year are all new, though the activities that have led to their production are identical to those of the previous year. The high school teachers who have graciously, indeed we might say bravely, offered us glimpses of their classrooms are also new to the project, representing a range of urban and suburban, honors and average, literature programs from the greater Albany, New York area. These teachers are identified in the stories by pseudonyms. Several of the teacher-researchers engaged in last year's work have continued with the research group. They include Ann Connolly of Bethlehem Central High School, Carol Forman-Pemberton of Burnt Hills/Ballston Lake, Tricia Hansbury-Zuendt of Canajoharie, and Doris Quick, recently retired from Burnt Hills and now teaching at Union College. In addition, two new researchers have joined the group, Susan Burke of Guilderland Schools, and John Danaher, who teaches at Shaker High School in North Colonie.

A growing body of theory and scholarship is devoted to legitimizing the concept and practice of teacher inquiry, so that its integrity as a mode of investigation no longer requires elaborate defense. More important, growing numbers of teachers are adding to the stock of formal knowledge about classroom life in such collections as Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change, eds., Dixie Goswami and Peter Stillman (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton, 1987) and Seeing for Ourselves: Case Study Research by Teachers of Writing, eds., Glenda Bissex and Richard Bullock (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987). As a result, the substantiveness of teacher knowledge, whether in the form of "case study" or that of classroom "story," is no longer hypothetical but is open to view in the public record. While there are differences of opinion among its advocates about the technical means of teacher inquiry, there is broad agreement that teachers have distinctive vantage points on what happens in classrooms, quite separate from those of educational researchers, leading them to a concrete, "phenomenal" understanding of school life that deserves to be regarded as authentic "knowledge," not just subjective impression or idiosyncratic anecdote. Their knowledge is that of the insider, whose "felt sense" of the school world, expressed typically in the form of narrative reflection, stands to enrich our sense of classroom life.

We have argued in general terms, as others have, for the usefulness of teacher stories, their value in enhancing teachers' reflectiveness about their instructional practices and settings, both in last year's research report and elsewhere (cf. "Knowing Our Language: A

Phenomenological Basis for Teacher Research," in Audits of Meaning: A Festschrift for Ann E. Berthoff, ed., Louise Z. Smith, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton; Heinemann, 1988). It remains here for readers to see for themselves the kind and quality of learning that stories make available, remembering that there are important differences between the sort of knowledge that comes from stories and that available from the discursive prose of conventional educational research. Stories depict and dramatize the life-world. They evoke; they do not assert. They are immersed in the particularity of actual experience, aiming at richness of event rather then simplicity or conciseness of statement. Stories do not, cannot, insist on their readings; instead, they bring their readers into the act of construing meaning. Themes emerge for attentive readers, and they have the effect of proposing a coherence for the text; but two readers will not always compose the same themes. Moreover, no thematic judgment will permanently reduce the complexity of the story itself: it is reread for new insights, altered meanings. Stories endlessly modify other stories; readings endlessly modify other readings.

Whatever individual readers see in these stories is something to share with others who may well have learned something else or more from the same texts. The value of the stories lies finally in the fact that they offer a context for conversation among teachers. The fuller that conversation, the more stories available to sustain it, the greater the gain in a qualitatively improved awareness of the meaningfulness of classroom life. By reproducing the life-world of school teaching and learning apart from the immediacy of teachers' actual engagement in that world, classroom narratives create the tranquil, objectified conditions needed for reflection while still retaining teachers' intuitive recognition of the complexities of their experience. Stories don't tell teachers what to do; they simply portray people doing, and also thinking and feeling. Watching others in action, readers also see themselves. Discovering personally meaningful themes in the stories, readers find coherence and support for their own professional work.

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Voices Making Meaning:
Reading the Texts with Tony Carrera

Tricia Hansbury-Zuendt
Canajoharie High School

July 20, 1989

I've spent the morning viewing once again the videotapes I made when I visited Tony Carrera's classroom as a teacher-researcher last January. I'd hoped that on this trip through the tapes I'd find the story -- the one I want to tell, the one that says for me, for Tony, and for others, what it means to be a student in that classroom. But which one is that? Which one will I tell?

I think back to the classroom itself. It's small, but large enough for the fourteen sophomores who pour in every seventh period to take honors English. I didn't see any pictures of Shakespeare; no poetry posters; none of the leftover-from-the-summer geraniums I thought were mandatory in English classrooms. One poster, a product of Sarah Lawrence college, is attached to a cabinet. On it appears a quote from Grace Paley: "A writer must be truthful. A story is a big lie. And in the middle of this big lie you're telling the truth."

The room is filled with cabinets and bookcases, but what struck me most were the student-made materials: a large cardboard model of a tape player someone made for part of some project; the half-finished sign which stretches across the front of the room over the blackboard and which will eventually read, "Don't believe everything you hear;" a can of paint in the corner, left by students who are putting their own design over a painting done by some other students several years ago. And piled everywhere are small boxes with students' names on them, which hold more projects and writings in process. There is a crate overflowing with writing folders -- a section for each class. It feels busy and comfortable in this room.

I think, too, about the reason I asked Tony if I could come into his classroom with my video equipment, cameraperson, notebooks, and interviews. I remember something I wrote at the beginning of the project....

January 6, 1989

I have always wanted to see some of Tony's classes. In his school, a small rural one much like my own, and in which he has taught for twenty years, he is admired by students, peers, and administrators as a good teacher; he has worked as a teacher-mentor; he has published books on writing instruction; he has helped me many times in solving some teaching dilemmas; he has, more recently, seemed more a real colleague, borrowing ideas from me almost as much as I use his. We've talked and argued so many times about reading, writing, literature, teaching; I'm curious to see how those discussions are translated into his actions in the classroom.

This project will add, I know, one more complication to our already busy days. I'm glad we're able to use the money the Center provides to supply substitute teachers and free our afternoons for observations and interviews, so that for a few days, at least, there will be time, a little more than usual, for that reflection, writing, talk and just plain breath-catching that never seems to be there in any normal school day.

July 20, 1989

When I look back on the lessons I saw, and consider the amount of time we spent on the interviews, and the amount of writing that Tony himself did -- to prepare for classes, during classes to record what was happening, and after classes, reacting to what he had seen and heard and then revising his plans accordingly -- I consider, through the haze of July's distance, what our days were usually like. It was, after all, a kind of luxury to be able to look so closely at a class. What a luxury for me to simply question: question everything that he did, and for a minute maybe forget about the immediacy of my own room, even though I was away for a few days, I could never really forget it; I know I saw much of Tony's class-- both his students and his method-- through the focus of my own. Still, it was useful to be able to think hard and talk lots about <u>teaching</u> only, not lesson plans. And when I wonder how he or anyone could consent to the presence of a researcher and cameras and microphones in his classroom, I know in a way why it was curiously appealing: my going into his class valued and validated his behavior, his activity, in a way that nothing else can, no other aspect of the school can, to have someone sit with you and talk with you about what you are doing and why you are doing it. Someone paid attention to him, in the capacity for which he is known and paid, as an English teacher. Someone let him talk about teaching, about the things he has been working on and reading about. Someone gave him the power and space to try to design what he hoped would be an interesting and effective lesson. How could he have said no?

January 8, 1989

Q: Tell me what you will be doing in this class for the study.

Tony: OK. This was, started out to be a couple of different things and finally I settled on something I really wanted to know about anyway, and I thought this was a good way to find out.... I thought, here's a chance while somebody else is going to be around in my room to give me another perspective on what's going on with trying to make comparisons between works, not first one work, and then the other, but two works together.

Q: Why?

Tony: Because I think you see things a little bit differently... To look at two works, both works together on three separate occasions, is different from looking at one work on one day and the other work on the next day. Is it better? I don't know. But it provides a little different perspective.... I'm really interested to see if people in tenth grade without a lot of formal training in terminology and experience with literary or critical approaches can still do the kinds of stuff that produce good interpretations of what I think are fairly sophisticated works for them. They're also good enough works, deep, rich, something

that seem to me to be worth spending time on.

So. They will be reading two different works at the same time.

How? The class will be divided into two groups, each of which will be reading one work, and working with each other to interpret it; each group will be raising questions about the work for the whole class, and each will be writing drafts of their formal interpretations of the work. Then, in a few days, they will switch pieces of literature, and do the same thing with the other work.

Why? Tony's hoping for some "cross-pollination," that students will benefit from being in somewhat shared contexts. They will hear members of the other group talking about the work they are reading and those ideas may inform their reading of their own piece. When they switch pieces, their reading of the second work will be influenced by its close proximity in time to the first work. I know that Tony likes to rebel against the "usual" way of doing things. He says, "It's not necessarily better, it's just different."

July 20, 1989

Many teachers would be envious of Tony's freedom in deciding what this tenth-grade honors class will do. He knows that in two years most of them will take Advanced Placement English and prepare for the AP exam. He knows that there is no state or departmental examination at the end of this year. The curriculum in this school exists, certainly, but not in the form of a written document outlining the activities or even the recommended literary works to be read in any particular class. Therefore, many of his lessons follow from ideas or questions that come up in other lessons. The course is constantly evolving and is therefore different every year. At the time of our study, close to the end of the first semester, students had worked through a textbook on semantics, had written a last chapter for the book ("So What?"), and had done lots and lots of their own writing. They came to their literary analysis activities, then, as writers, just as Tony himself does.

He chose the two literary works for this project ("The Book of the Grotesque" by Sherwood Anderson and "Law Like Love" by W.H. Auden) because he was interested in them himself. And I'm thinking now about their ironic significance to this project in general and what it means to try to tell someone's story -- your own or a colleagues'. Do I detect a sly wink? In these two literary works, the disparate voices clamoring that they know what law is, yet are only able to define it within a particular and narrow context, as well as the people who inhabit the old man's dreams (each a grotesque because he has grabbed a truth and tried to make it his own) speak clearly to Tony about his own mission in the classroom. There are only contexts; he wants students to know that: your perspective determines what you see. Auden's poem makes that message pretty clear; and Anderson's work echoes the message and adds its own twist: caught within your own perspective, it is easy and dangerous to believe it is the only one. We risk becoming grotesques ourselves when we believe too strongly and too blindly in one thing. There are, of course, other readings of both these works, but their shared contexts suggest the value of ambiguity and uncertainty, and remind me of Tony's statement that he wants students to learn to withhold an early judgment, to be comfortable with uncertainty, and not to jump to

quick conclusions or easy answers. He structured the unit so that students wrote at least two drafts of their interpretation of each work, and some wrote as many as four drafts.

Important here is the act of making connections, a stance he clearly values and encourages in students by setting up lessons, as he did this one, in such a way that it can't be avoided. He wants students to make connections between works, between units, between courses, between their lives and school. He believes it's more effective to make those connections within a process rather than after it, in an all-at-once kind of experience instead of "first one, then the other."

January 8, 1989

Q: What do you want kids to be able to do with literature?

Tony: I'm not going to use the word 'appreciate' because I don't know what that means. I guess I'd like them to be able to do whatever they want to do with it, and unfortunately, whatever listmakers decide they have to be able to do with it. Like answer multiple choice questions. I know we keep talking about how those tests are going to change or disappear, but they haven't so far. They're still there.

Q: How? How are you going to do it?

Tony: I guess I started teaching by trying to teach 'the method' of reading poetry, whatever I guessed people in college were using when they were making me read it. And then I tried to teach my method, and if I can make a distinction between that period and what I think I'm doing now, I'm trying to get people to develop their own methods, and I'm using mine more as a model, a way to do it, rather than as the way to do it. But I can never tell exactly where I am in there, especially when I'm alone in the classroom, because if I'm doing the lesson, then what I think is happening - another observer might say, well, you thought you were modeling that, but really you were imposing it, or you presented that as the only way.

I'm moving towards their taking this method of finding issues in the text and then when talking about them using the textual references to internalize that. And do that in their own independent reading also, not just in their writing of analytical stuff, but as a reading process of keeping mental track of the kinds of things that are going on and your preliminary 'so what?' -- what's going to turn out to be important? Otherwise they're just looking at words.

January 11, 1989, 1:30 p.m.

From the transcript of the second class I observed:

Tony: I'm going to ask the people who did the poem to contribute from their page of issues: this is important, this is important. Then we'll make a list here of things we think are important and try to identify which ones we should deal with, and I'll ask each person

to take one of those and try to write a claim about it, and then we'll try to put them together in two separate groups. (reads part of poem aloud) OK, tell me some issues in "Law Like Love." Who did the poem? Raise your hands. We'll start with Eric.

Eric: An issue. Three different points of view from which the law is interpreted.

Dennis: There's more than three points of view, though.

Tony: More than three. Is it important to know how many, exactly?

Dennis: Well, I don't think it was. Why did they pick those exact people?

Tony: Why those people, such as?

Dennis: Such as the priest and the old man and the young boy.

Tony: Keith.

Keith: I think that everybody in the poem thinks they know what the law is, but they don't.

Tony: How can we make that an issue?

Keith: Why does everybody think they know the laws but they don't? Because the judge he says the law is, 'well, let me explain it again,' but he never even said anything. He said the law is the law.

Tony: OK, Patty?

Patty: I think it shows there's different definitions or connotations about the word 'law.' Law doesn't have to be in government. Everybody has their own set laws. The priest, the law is the Bible; the judge, the law is government; and the elders, you have to respect your elders, that's society's law.

Tony: OK, different definitions or connotations of the law. Each has his own. Give me the rest of what you said. [repeats above].

Patty: Law of nature -- they talked about the sun.

Tony: Nature's law.

Dennis: At this point in the poem they haven't talked about love yet, so when I got to the point where we stopped (reading out loud) I was wondering when love was going to come in.

Tony: When will love be? When are they going to bring up love? ...What else? People who read the poem.... Issues in the text? Let's give you a minute to rest and look at what you have written. Then we'll go to "The Book of the Grotesque." .... (to Stacy) You said before class, why is everything so obvious, I want to put that here, as an issue.

Keith: It just seems that everything that he writes really the judge, the priest, it just seems sort of comical like the law, well you know what it is.

Tony: It seems he mocking the ideas of others? ... Now I want each one of you to take one of these things to work with and I want you in the second half of this class to make a claim that relates to specific lines, words, section, whatever, in this text. Patty, I'm going to give you this one [from the list they generated and he put on the board] cause this one is yours. Stacy, I would like you to try to say something about this; I get the impression that you were expecting something more difficult or hidden or secret or something. So where is it obvious or straightforward? Dennis, how about if you deal with this idea of love and when love comes into the picture in the poem. Keith I want you to do the whole business of mockery. That's what your claim is going to be about, all right? You find whatever you found in the poem to say, yes, this is irony, mockery, whatever. Who's left? Jason? Who else did the poem? Janie, we haven't heard anything from you yet. All right, pick one up here.

Next, students who read "The Book of the Grotesque" list the issues they see; all of them spend the last part of the period writing interpretive statements.

January 12, 1989

There is a seriousness of purpose in this classroom. Students are expected to work hard, and they do. I have seen them respond to the titles of both works, choose which one they will read first, raise questions about the piece, and write statements which will be the beginnings of formal interpretation, which they shared with others who are reading the same work. Tony is making clear to them from the start that the purpose of assignments, of sharing ideas, and of raising questions, is to formulate the interpretation. They will have a chance to write several drafts of this writing. They are struggling with these two difficult works but I do not see anyone who is discouraged or giving up. As they sit in their groups and read their statements to each other, I watch as they ask each other questions for clarification, as they gently challenge each other, and as they take notes on what each other says. Today, only the third time spent on these works, they worked in their groups to prepare a presentation to the other group, of their interpretation of their work. To prepare as an audience as well as a presenter, each student will read the other work and raise questions about it before the next class.

January 12, 1989, 12:30 p.m.

Tony: I'm deciding to leave out a couple of steps that I think they don't need. Four of them were in the study hall this morning, at least one person from each group. So I said, this is what I'd like to do today, do you think you'd be able to do that, in the class period? We didn't talk about the literary works, but we talked about quickly reading three or four of each others' papers to get a sense of areas of, the range of interpretation here, and then taking the next fifteen or twenty minutes to try to prepare that presentation of their interpretation to the other group. And they seemed to feel like they had a couple of questions, so they gave me a better answer than, 'yeah we can do that, how can we

do that?' So, we'll try it. If the presentations and the questions aren't as good, I can always do them with the other steps I was going to do anyway.

Q: I have a couple of questions. First, what were the other steps?

Tony: Well, I was going to read aloud the rest of the works, I was going to have them make up specific revising plans (for their first drafts of the interpretation), and comment on each others' papers, and do a new draft before they see or hear much about the other work, and I don't think they need to do that. I haven't seen papers yet, and the people this morning have study halls later in the day, so they haven't written, and I didn't want to talk about interpretations. Today while they're trying to read them quickly I'm just going to go around and try to scan them and get some sense of what's going on in each one, but tomorrow will tell a better story about where we are.

I don't expect them to resolve (any of the questions) in twenty minutes. I don't think I can resolve it in twenty minutes, but I think what we're going to get to through the two presentations will be, 'what are the big, unresolved questions here, and what level of resolution or closure is possible about these things?' Because that's going to be the focus of the next [draft of the] interpretation.

Q: When they write notes on the papers that they're reading today, what will they base those notes on?

Tony: 'I don't understand this.' Or, 'Yeah, let's use this'. Notes today should be -- one plan was to make the notes today be, 'here's how you need more information' or 'this conflicts with something you say earlier' --

Q: So they'd be guided towards analysis of the paper itself.

Tony: They would have been, but not today.

Q: Now they'll be guided towards what's important for a presentation.

Tony: Right. Which is, I think, a level up. And it's asking that the other one gets done kind of in a hurry, in an open forum. I don't think the discussion today is going to leave time to have what happened with Nick's idea (the other day), where people wanted to know more about that idea. I think it's going to have to be more task oriented.

January 12, 1989, 4:00 p.m.

Today's class was more task oriented. When students entered the room, the desks were already arranged into two circles, so time was not spent moving desks during class. Tony had placed a copy of the assignment sheet for the presentation on each desk so no time was wasted shuffling those papers around. He began the class by clapping his hands and saying:

C'mon, c'mon, read the assignment, let's go! Put your own interpretation on your desk. Pass it to the left. While you're reading, I'll come around and read them, too.

Don't talk about the works. Write on the papers, if you want to, take notes about them. You know that after that, you have twenty minutes to fashion an interpretation as a group for the other group tomorrow.

Students started to read and pass papers, and then they began to work on preparing the presentation. It has to follow a specific structure: some talk about the title, an interpretative claim about it; some discussion about the most important parts of the work; some discussion about the most important issues and questions raised by the work with reference to those parts; and a summary statement: "the best interpretation you can come up with."

When students in each group began to talk about the works and put together the presentation, Tony divided his time between the two groups, monitoring their progress on the task, not commenting on their specific statements about the works. I listened to the group nearest me as they started with comments about what they thought the work ("The Book of the Grotesque") would be about when they read the title. Tony's comment: "What parts of the work will you need to discuss?" Every time he came over to the group I was nearest, I heard him say, "What parts of the work will you need to discuss?" They begin to speculate about the work in general, referring to the text, raising questions they have, offering solutions, comparing the work to others they know. Tony's comment: "What places are you going to talk about? Know that, before you say what has to be said." They want to answer his question, but he backs away. The discussion continues without him. He returns: "I don't hear you talking about places. What are you going to use for data?" Meanwhile, they continue to try to come to an understanding about the story. The announcement is made, "You have five minutes. Assign parts of the works to individuals to write and talk about for tomorrow." In this group, Michelle starts assigning parts with the consent of the others, based, I think, on the issues each one was discussing.

I enjoyed watching these students work together to try to make sense for themselves of this difficult piece. They had speculated, had compared original reactions, shared their frustration at surprises they found in the text, and tried to fit the pieces together. In others words, they were making a meaning from this text. It surprised me, then, to hear two of them comment at the end of the class that "we didn't accomplish much." Why this reaction from them?

Was it the typical self-deprecation of a student who believes a teacher is listening, voiced in hopes of a compliment? Or was it a genuine expression of dismay at not having a presentation ready by the end of the period? Most of these students clearly want to do what Tony asks them. I found my self feeling my own kind of dismay at the possibility that some of them might believe that sharing expressions of uncertainty, offering speculative thinking, might be a waste of time. Where will there be room for speculation? For uncertainty?

January 13, 1:30 p.m.

From the transcript of the third class:

Tony: OK, we're going to start. People in the audience, you should have your copy of the work that they're talking about in front of you so you can write comments, questions, and other things on that. If you have also the sheet of issues that you saw in the work that you want to hear about out there, then you'll be in a position to ask questions to get the information you need to write your own interpretation. Now let's remember that these things were put together quickly. Let's consider this report a draft of an interpretation just like your own writing was a draft of an interpretation. They're not finished products. OK. Any questions?

So to get a chance to get all the way through the work please don't ask questions during somebody's presentation. We'll have time after.

Group 1 (Presentation)

Janie: In "Law Like Love" the title is sort of showing that law and love are similar in some ways and the last stanza is like a bridge between the title and the rest of the poem.

Dennis: Love comes into play in the last stanza when he sums up what he thinks of law by comparing love to it. He doesn't state the word 'law' in the last stanza because he just makes a comparison. In the very last sentence he says, 'We don't keep love just like we don't follow..." Just like he doesn't follow the law, we don't keep love. "Love we seldom keep." So he's saying we don't stick to our standards of love just like we don't follow the law.

Patty: In the first stanza he's describing the gardener's law as the sun or nature which he has to obey in order to have a successful garden. In the second it is society's law about respecting elders, and the third is the priest's law of the Bible. A sin is sort of like saying something is illegal. And religious people obey this law, Bible do's and don't's; and the fourth, the judge's law saying that law is law. But that isn't explaining it; it's just stating it, so he doesn't even come to a point about it, except where he represents the government and that's representative of another type of law. And in the fifth stanza, scholars don't know or can't say if law is wrong or right since they are law-abiding. They can't say it's wrong if they're abiding by it. So they, all five of these are different views of the law specifically. The author uses these to prove his own point. You have to look at these people as different connotations and see that they could be because they are all in different environments, different occupations and ways of being brought up and no one's idea of what law is is right or wrong, so that is showing no one really knows what law is. It's sort of a confused word, just like love is.

Eric: As we just looked at, different people feel certain ways about various things, according to environment, occupation, and personality. Since we have seen what a few

specific people here have said about law, the author's next step is to try and gather evidence not of those specific people, but of everyone in general to try to support his own feelings located near the end of the poem. Let me describe, in our opinion, of course, what the author is trying to bring about in these two stanzas of the concept of law -- stanzas six and seven. In the first and second stanza the author says, 'Others say laws are fake, others say laws are at stake.' Here he is trying to project what sometimes people say about law and their opinions. But as he gets into the next three lines, 'others say, others say law is no more; law is gone away,' maybe what is really trying to be said is that other people say that what they hear is the law is defeated or going away.

Putting this together, what we come up with, in our words, is that everyone hears about what other people think law is, but no one's conclusion is valid. It is all their connotation. 'And always the loud angry crowd, very angry and very loud,' he states in the next stanza. I see a group of people very large, upset and loud and the thing that comes to my mind is a protest of some sort -- a protest against the law. Yet in the next two lines he said, 'Law is weak' and 'always the soft idiot, softly me.' In a sense now he feels ashamed at his own people and the way they carry on such. He feels like an idiot and to look at it justifies itself, referring to the 3rd line, 'Law is weak,' or maybe it can be said, 'we the people,' right? For who makes the laws? We make the laws.

In our interpretations we believe that everyone is right here. Everyone has their own connotation of the law and law is what people make it. Isn't this essentially one and the same? Don't be loud and angry with the world if you are unhappy with yourself.

Stacy: The eighth and ninth stanzas are bridges --- it's a bridge between the first, seventh, and the tenth. Each says that he sees all these people who say, 'The law is' -- they all have their own idea, the law is 'this,' but they all believe that their idea is great. Him seeing this -- he can't do this, so he compares it to love.

Keith: The author explains in the beginning how each individual has their own idea of what law is. They all say, 'law is this' or 'law is that', but we've come to wonder if they really know. He uses the first seven stanzas to show that by writing the last stanza and the title he explains that law is like love and the two can be interchanged in some ways. By interchanging the two it means that everybody has their own idea of what law is and that they are just as different as what they thought love was. (Presentation ends, discussion begins)

Tony: I thought you did a nice job, especially under the circumstances where you had 30 seconds to throw it together.....What I'd like you to do now is just take a time out for about one minute. [To rest of students:] Look down -- what did you come up with when you read this poem? What did you want to know more about? What things seem to you like they're still unresolved? I know we're putting everybody on the spot up here, but we're doing it in a friendly way because when you're going to make an interpretation you're already on that spot. We're doing it a little more publicly here, that's all, and we understand that this, too, is a draft, an attempt to answer something. So let's take a minute to look over our own list of issues here and see what we

want to ask. Michelle, go ahead.

Michelle: You said that everybody had a varying opinion of what the law was and everything, but did you get the feeling that in the eighth stanza there was a sense of chaos due to this varying interpretation of the law?

Eric: Well, I did not just say that. Were you listening?

Michelle: Yes, but I had trouble understanding what you were saying.

Eric: We're saying, the lines, go up a bit, Michelle, to stanza seven where it says...'loud and angry.' All the people are loud and angry and corrupt. And yet it says, 'law is weak.' I think he's sort of feeling ashamed of himself and he thinks he's sort of an idiot, because when you look at it, who makes the laws? People make the laws and yet everybody's all in chaos. They can't live by the standards they set themselves.

Dennis: So in that eighth stanza he's confused. He doesn't know...

Terri: I got the feeling when I read this poem here that what the guy is saying here is that law, like love, is an unnecessary necessity. Is that what you felt?

Dennis: No,.... We don't understand what you mean.

Keith: We feel that it's a necessity, but basically what he's saying is, it's unnecessary.

Terri: That it's necessary, but that sometimes it changes. I really can't say what I want to, but...

Tony: Would you finish her sentence with a different word? You said you don't agree that law is an unnecessary necessity? Is that it?

Terri: Yeah, law, like love, is an unnecessary necessity.

Tony: An unnecessary necessity.

Terri: Yeah, it is, but it's not.

Tony: It is, but it's not.

Stacy: Do you think every one has their own?

Terri: Yeah, it changes.

Stacy: Might be the law but everyone has their own view of it?

Terri: Yeah.

Dennis: Poking fun at the different people because they all, no one decides what law was and what love was, but they couldn't expound on it.

Patty: Do you know what law is exactly?

Dennis: What law? He was just poking fun at the fact that everybody has their own laws and everybody is supposed to obey their own laws but they can't.

Tony: Can anybody identify the area of the text, a part that you can read aloud, the data that gives you the warrant for saying it's an unnecessary necessity or no, it's not, or what you said about, 'yeah, it's necessary, but everybody has his own,' or you can't live by the standards. Where does it come from? What's in the text that says one idea makes more sense than the other?

Dennis: It was unnecessary that the people really tried to, like the gardener said that 'it's the sun.' The sun to the gardener is everything because that's what makes his plants grow and that's a necessity.

Eric: The sun is what makes things work.

Stacy: That's why it's necessary. That's why it's necessary in a sense, but it's unnecessary because everyone has their own.

Michelle: Yeah, it's unnecessary for the judge.

Patty: Yeah, cause everyone has their own opinion of what law is. They can't come to an agreement on it.

Dennis: It should say, well, I think it was unnecessary.

Patty: It isn't saying it's necessary.

Terri: We think we don't need it; that's why I say unnecessary because nobody thinks they need law but then necessity, because it protects ourselves from ourselves and from everybody else.

Keith: Well, I don't know about anybody -- I just got, personally, I said this yesterday,...it wasn't the whole group consensus, but it was something I got from the poem. I thought that when it says, 'And always the loud angry crowd, very angry and very loud,' that law is weak. I thought that crowd was on the outside looking in at everybody else who had their idea of law. Like the gardener says that law is the sun and the angry crowd is everybody else but the gardener was saying but they disagreed. When it changed to the priest then the gardener went outside and the priest came in and the large angry crowd was disagreeing with what the priest had to say. They didn't believe necessarily that they had to follow that law.

Tony: I want to give a name to, a category, to the idea that you're talking about here, partly because I can't keep track of what everybody is saying about it. But if you write the

word, 'perspective' or 'point of view' down in the poem somewhere, there might be something to look at in your next level of interpretation. According to whom are you saying this. So instead of arguing about what is the right word, it seems to me we have a paradox here and you have to try to explain it by saying it's necessary to look at it this way or unnecessary to look at it that way. What I'd like you to try to do is sort it out according to the text. Where, what line is it that justifies that it's necessary in this way ... We don't have time for any more questions for this group. Thank you.

[This discussion is followed by a similar presentation from those who read "The Book of the Grotesque."]

January 13, 1989, 2:30 p.m.

Tony: I was exactly where I wanted to be in the classroom for almost all that class. Except for a few side trips to tell somebody let her answer the question, and save that behavior for another time, I felt like I was in a community of people that were interested in the same thing, and it was actually the same thing I was interested in. It felt like I was taking part in a literary discussion. They said some things that were interesting to me personally as a reader that I want to use in informing my own reading of the work. And that's a bonus in a sense, but geez, it shouldn't be. It should be the reason to come back here next week, and now I'm eager to come back here next week.

Walking down here I was trying to define,'what is that position, exactly, that you're so happy about?'... It's not equality,, it's--

Q: Like a co-reader with the class?

Tony: Yeah, the differences between us are in our ages, are in our world views, are in our experiences with texts and with life, and with experiences with this text in particular. They're not differences in the sense of, 'I know everything, you don't know anything.' These students did not act like little vessels waiting to be filled with facts, at all. Nor did they treat each other that way.

We only had so much time and I wanted to get to some point of closure before three days [a long weekend] intervened... I felt like we got there. I felt like I pushed it a little bit, too. If we had one report a day, I think the idea of perspectives would have come from somebody else, rather than me. I had two reports planned, and so many people had talked about point of view, that OK, I gave it a name and said, 'now what?' And I wanted it to be that name, because that's a name from semantics [an earlier unit]. And I heard so many things come from semantics that I wanted to go and shake somebody's hand.

What are we doing here? Pulling strings? Yeah, we're pulling strings all the time in the classroom. We want certain things to happen, and one of the strings I've been trying to pull is to get people to make connections between ways of looking at language and what

language does, to ways of looking at anything, and things that are written down in language, also.

July 20, 1989

I remember that, like Tony, I thought the presentations and the discussions that followed were good. Students met in their groups for a few minutes at the beginning of the class to put together their notes, they wrote a little, they went over their last minute decisions and instructions for their presentation. I had the feeling that each student had done a fair amount of thinking and work outside of class to prepare their own part. The atmosphere in the room was one that suggested, 'We know this is important, and we'll rise to the task.' Was it the camera's presence that added the official air to the proceedings, or was it a pressure the students put on themselves? I don't know. I do know that they approached this task in earnest, both as presenters and as audience, and it was impressive. However, when I read the transcripts now, I notice that much of what they say formally is a paraphrase of the texts; I think they were closer to interpretive discussion during the question and answer period, but I also need to remember that these are sophomores with little experience in literary analysis. They are beginners and this is only the third class period they've spent with both of these texts.

I add to that thought another: part of Tony's experiment with this lesson is to see how far students can get with little direct teacher intervention, given a fairly well-defined structure within which to work. I remember his almost apologetic explanation of why he himself added the term "point of view" to the discussion. Each day he wrote on the board: "Response --- issues --- interpretation" to remind them of the method. Within that context students had kept two kinds of response logs (one for each work), had raised issues in discussion, and now, given presentations. Next they would write a draft of an interpretation.

When I later read over those papers, including the early drafts, I saw that Tony had responded to their writings as structure and argument, rather than as idea. He was, after all, trying to give them complete freedom as interpreters, believing that the structure he set up would push them --help them push themselves -- far beyond their first reactions to these texts.

Yes, I thought it felt too structured, too fast-paced, but I remember something he said in one of the interviews:

> I've been involved in a million discussions and I've seen lots of them in the classroom, too, that don't go anywhere. And when I say, 'go anywhere,' I mean they do not go towards an interpretation, they don't go towards what anybody can see or express as an understanding, they don't go towards, 'I can see something now about my method.' They go toward endless spirals of talk ... I don't mean everything has to go to a five-paragraph essay. Not at all. But if at the end of a forty-minute discussion, people can say, and can only say, 'we talked for forty minutes,' I don't think that's exactly what I'm hired to do. And I don't think that's exactly what I want to do.

August 3, 1989

As I listen to the tapes of our interviews, I notice that Tony refers often to the "process" of what students are doing. They need to learn the process of interpretation, or of anything else that they will do in this class. But is that "process," as it is used to describe this class, really better named "procedure?" How do we distinguish between the two?

I think of process as something which is continuous, something you inhabit, a discovery mode, during which you might not even know where you are going. What does the word mean when we use it to refer to writing, as in "seeing writing as a process"? As something which progresses in stages, but whose stages are interconnected -- one doesn't end and then another begin; they are recursive, going back and forth into and out of each other, as the writer makes new discoveries and tries new ways to present them. It's movement, in and out, back and forth. I guess there always does have to be some end point. Teachers set due dates for papers, and just as I have to end this writing at some point, I know that I will feel that it is not finished. It has changed as I have changed, as my perspectives and thoughts about them have changed. So.

When Tony says his students are able to "skip a few steps" because they are ready for the next one, that implies, to me, not a process, as I've described a writer's process, but a procedure, instead: there are certain steps which one undertakes in order to get from here to there, from the first reading of a work, to the interpretation (formal, written) of that work. A procedure is a series of steps which will get you to a predetermined end point. I think of the student writing groups which I have organized over the years, and the stories which other teachers have told me about the way they run writing groups in their own classrooms. A far cry, some of those experiments, from the response group Peter Elbow described. Why? Isn't it more than the difference in age between Elbow's college students and ours, those still in the high school? I'm beginning to think so. It's that time factor again. The school environment is product-oriented, time-limited. Those overly formatted writing groups are designed to effectively maintain "crowd control" in an atmosphere which cannot cope with confusion or noise. They are also designed to get "results" -- measurable ones. A student will leave the experience with notes from other students or response sheets filled out by others. These are countable things. They "prove" that the time spent wasn't wasted. There was a product; students did not "just sit and chat."

Are we that bound to our fear that time won't be spent fruitfully? Not only do we want measurable results, but it will help if the change in students is predictable and most of all, timely. But how realistic is it to think that fifteen or twenty or thirty young people would be ready for the same task at the same time, or would need the same guidance and method as anyone else.

Back to Tony's students. In reading these two literary works, and trying to make sense of them, they may very well be involved in a kind of process, a recursive, spiraling meaning-making. Is it that as teachers we design activities-- should we call them steps? -- which we hope will ensure that the process does in fact occur, knowing that we will not be inside of it in the way our students will be? Especially when we teach works we know well, we cannot retrace those beginning, meaning-making steps we took ourselves at one time. We see new ways to read texts -- Hamlet for example -- each time we come back to them, but we build on former experiences with those texts. And so do we look for evidences of students' immersion in the process by defining it as a series of steps? I don't know. That doesn't change my feeling as an

observer of Tony's class, that we were bound within a procedure. This does not mean that students, as first time readers, felt the same way.

I'm recalling the interviews I had with some of Tony's students. They tried hard to describe for me what they thought of the class. Keith very carefully came up with this description, which he viewed as high praise:

Keith: That's what class discussion is most like. I picture a big board meeting and all these people sitting at this horseshoe table, and there's smoke in the room, but there wasn't smoke in (this) room, but we're all kind of sitting there and, 'let's go over the projectiles [projections?] of what you think we're going over in the fiscal year,' and relates to, 'so what did we accomplish in this period of time,' and 'how far are we along and are we doing OK.' I can just picture this person up there with their little pointing stick, pointing to the bar graph, saying, 'How far have we gotten?' 'Yes, we're almost done with our interpretations now,' and 'time to collect the profits' and all that.

Patty: [describing the class]: It's like putting all the students in a circle with literature in the middle and the teacher, I'd say would just...be out around the circle. Sort of like the earth, the outside of the earth, then the moon is orbiting around the earth. And the people on the outside of the earth... are trying to figure out what the inside of the earth is about because nobody's been there....And so they're trying to figure out what the work is... how it is being interpreted by the author, the other people or the whole consensus of what it is. They're trying to find out what it is, just like the center of the earth. And the teacher, by orbiting, is like guiding everybody, everybody going around. And he guides everybody through the discussion or through finding out what that is.

Keith: We're all there to find out what everybody thinks about the work. We all play an equally important part in class. We're all listening and we're all speaking -- except for the teacher, he stays out. He's there to lead us, not tell us.

Michelle: We have the same role, basically, as Mr. Carrera. Because he does all the work with us. He has the same role as us. To be questioning and inquisitive. If you have a question, it's proper in that class to state it.

Mr. Carrera is not a normal teacher. Normal teachers stand up in front of the class and tell you what to do. He more or less sits in with the class and does everything with us. Only he knows what he's doing more than we do.

January 23, 1989

Tony: If I'm not looking for an efficient way to do the things that I think are worth doing - in other words, I know I've said on the tape several times that this is going faster than I expected it to, and when it started to go faster I started to make some changes down the line that I had go faster also, because I believe that once the speed picks up you don't usually decelerate from that point ... I'm after students to push themselves in terms of

time -- more than time, time's easier to measure -- in terms of honesty and completeness of attempt to do something. And yes, a three minute attempt at interpretation probably isn't going to produce the result a thirty minute attempt does, by the same kid, even.

I don't think anything Tom [student] does in the community is ever going to get him past his method of operation right now, which is -- boom!-- one-liners. He one-lines it in discussion, and he one-lines it in class. Now, many, many interesting things that he said about the comparison between Scrooge and this character [referring to his comment that the old man in "The Book of the Grotesque" reminded him of Scrooge], they were there, they existed as making meaning in a transitory sense and now they're gone. He can't use them and nobody else is using them either because they never got into anybody's writing.

The time pressure in this class is not to get it into forty minute segments, but if we can read six books instead of three, I think it's better to read six books. I do. I think more connections can be made for the first work with five other works than can be made with two. I can't prove that, but the interconnectedness of things--- one thing always seems to inform the other. I'd rather do Brave New World and 1984 in four weeks than do Brave New World in four weeks.

We could have left out a report here and a seminar there, and just had time for sitting around and thinking and talking about the book. I didn't want to do that.

August 15, 1989

I'm still trying to find a way to describe this experience. What do I want readers to understand about this teacher and his classroom? about me and my reactions to what I saw and heard? Will they only hear my frustration at the structure and the pace? (a state more revealing of my own method than of Tony's, perhaps). Will readers see, also, the larger frustration, its cause inherent in the structure of the school itself? Tony's method, exaggerated by the time limits of this very project, focuses for me what teachers face daily: limited time and limited authority to do anything other than work against it.

His reaction to my comments about his classes:

My intent is to push people to start--yes, I usually give them less time than they'd feel comfortable with--to start thinking and writing and making meaning. To challenge them. To jolt them out of the "studio audience" mentality they come to class with. I push them to open things up, often in several directions, in many modes. I don't know ahead of time what will work for each student or for all students, but I think that a combination of things gives everyone a chance.

I **don't** hurry them to finish examining the meanings and interpretations they develop. I push them to start saying "So what?" I push them to continue saying it. I push them to explore the limits of saying it. I don't push them to settle for quick and easy final answers. We came back to those two works many times during the year. I don't have

final answers about them yet.

I must have said 5000 times that we're looking for **an** answer, not **the** answer. Better yet, we're looking for answers. It is critical to another point about my intent in teaching: I don't insist that there always be synthesis, that there always be closure. In fact, the word "ambiguity"--settling for ambiguity--must be in the tapes 4000 times. I picked two works that resist closure, especially the fiction piece. What I'm after is not closure, but the examination of what degree of closure we are reaching, and a conscious evaluation of it, by students and me. And then the question "So what?" again. What can it mean that we do not reach closure about this work, or these works, or any works?

My goal is for each person to develop a method--a means, a number of ways of looking at things--of interpretation. The conscious parts (using a particular model, writing about the title, meta-reading, choosing "important" places for close readings) will still, I think, be method.

In this "first" unit of literature, I'm asking students to begin using many materials and working modes they're not accustomed to. I thought they did well with two very difficult works, with practically nothing from me except, "Let's look at it this way now." I took myself out of the picture because I think that, in the absence of teacher voices, students will discover their own. And they will listen to each other. And they will like it. And they will not rely on me to do their thinking for them, to repeat the "good" ideas so they'll know which ones to write down for the test.

Were the interpretations great? No, although there were, I thought, some very good ones. Were the discussions great? I liked the seminar. I liked the responses they made to titles, etc. I liked the interactions that took place during the reports, including the confrontations.

Were the reports great? No, and I didn't expect them to be. They weren't final reports, and they weren't cast or assigned to be that way. They were, "Here's what we've come up with so far...what do you think?" reports. They were, like almost all the writings and speaking in this project, working hypotheses about meaning that continued to evolve through the various looks we took at the works and at each others' looks at the works.

I think that's how readers make meaning and examine the meanings they have made. Fifteen sophomores took two works that baffled twenty seniors and made some sense of the works, some sense of themselves, and some sense of themselves as interpreters. That's what I want.

If some parts of this went too fast for comfort, I don't apologize. It's not always helpful to be comfortable, and I want to be challenged as much as I challenge the class. Last year wasn't the same, next year won't be the same. Who is so smart that he knows the perfect order and pace for all classes? I trust myself--not to know everything in advance, but to know what to do next. I try to create situations in reading and writing and speaking and listening where students can develop the same sense: "I'm not satisfied yet; I think I'll do this next."

Anyway, this is a writing class, and that's what I think I teach: writing. Literature is writing, good writing (at least somebody thought so). Student writing, I made a year-long effort to show, should be looked at as literature, written by younger, less experienced writers. Writers with no connections.

More thoughts on pace. Speed is always an important variable. Some people like to work fast, and many do their best work under pressure. Keith, master of the boardroom, likes to write one draft fast and then make minor changes. How does this relate to his boardroom metaphor?

I'm asking for people to start immediately--with the title, the first available piece of text--to consider issues of possible importance and then to reevaluate them in further reading and writing and speaking and listening about the work. And don't stop too soon.

Developing your own sense of interpreting and of yourself as an interpreter. This is what I'm asking students to do. It's also what I'm trying to be and to do in the classroom.

January 18, 1989, 4:30

During the presentations the other day when Terri said she thought maybe the law (in the poem) was an "unnecessary necessity", I thought she showed an insightful understanding of the poem, but several students were quick to question her-- just one more crazy statement from Terri. Tony followed up on her comment the following day by asking students to do some writing about it, following Peter Elbow's practice of playing the games of believing and doubting: He asked them first to write that law is a necessity, then, that it's unnecessary, and finally, that it's both necessary and unnecessary. I like the way he used the idea to structure an activity that allowed everyone to think the idea through. I like the validity it gave Terri as a student -- much more than an immediate praise might have, because now her idea is being used; and I like the fact that Dennis, who was originally so doubtful as the sense of her statement, began the seminar discussion later with a comment that showed his new understanding.

In this, the last class which I visited, and whose format Tony has called a "seminar," students raised questions they still had about the two pieces, and spent some time drawing connections between the two. This is to prepare for the second draft of their interpretation.

January 18, 12:30 p.m.

Q: You say that today you're doing something that you're calling a seminar. Could you define the term seminar as you're using it?

Tony: Yeah. First of all, the desks are turned towards each other....Usually we make a circle so that everybody sees the face of the speaker and so that everybody has a chance to hear the speaker also, because each person has to take her own notes today. This is not going on the board, it's not getting filtered through me or my handwriting or anything else. It's your own responsibility to come here with the things you wanted to say and to take

away from this the things that you think that you need for the interpretation you're going to write. Come prepared to speak, not just off the cuff. There'll be some spontaneous things, too, I hope... So they're supposed to prepare notes to talk about these unresolved things, and we'll take ten minutes to talk about the poem, ten more to talk about the short story, and then we'll try to establish some comparisons, which was the same thing that I was after in the bonus problems also, of making a cross from one work to the other. Comparing them as to subjects, attitudes, techniques, meanings, things we can't figure out, ambiguity, degrees of closure. This is their first try with me to do this with a literary work, and so my expectations are that it will be kind of slow, and I'm going to let it go slowly so that if we talk only about comparing subjects and that's all we get done in ten minutes, that's OK. I'll ask questions, but I don't want to give answers or do one of those, 'Let me see if I can pose it this way,' and then ask a rhetorical question, really, and just watch everybody nod.

Q: Purpose of doing this now?

Tony: They've had a chance to write an interpretation, they've read some other interpretations, there's been lots of talk, lots of good talk about the poem and about the short story. The assignment for tomorrow is to write that next interpretation of the work that they started with, and this is an opportunity to put out on the floor other issues that either have not been raised or have not been dealt with yet.

Q: What difficulties do you see kids having today?

Tony: Being able to take notes fast enough to keep track of what's being said and still be able to use the notes and also to stay in touch with what they wanted to say. That's why I ask them to write it, so they don't lose their own personal agendas, things they want to know for today...[Another difficulty may be] that people come in and nobody has anything written on paper, then ... it will more, I guess, 'off-the-cuff,' [which] is my expression for things that are spontaneous that ought to be better than spontaneous because some thinking and writing should have been done first.

Q: What's your role going to be today?

Tony: As much as I hate the word, 'facilitator,' I guess.

Q: Why do you hate the word?

Tony: Because of the context in which it's usually used ... Reminds me of so many group-dynamics courses that I took that, when we got done talking, everybody said, "Boy, wasn't that great? Yes. Bye."

Q: How are you going to be the facilitator?

Tony: I'm going to keep the discussion going, and I'll ask people to contribute if they haven't said anything, and I'll try to keep some sense of how much pause is needed between one comment and asking for the next one. And I'm also gonna stop quickly any arguments that are personal this-and-thats.

Q: How will you know whether today's class went well or not?

Tony: Partly by how much work I have to do.

Q: If you have to do more work, then...

Tony: Then it wasn't so hot because they didn't take control as a group or as individuals, and I would hope it isn't going to turn out to be the argument between the smart kid and the smart kid. It isn't going to be the argument between the smart kid and the teacher, because I'm not going to argue. That's not going to be my job here. It might feel like an argument to the student sometimes when I keep asking what do you mean, or exactly how does that fit the text, but that's OK. The difference between pressing for more detail or a clearer expression of it and saying, "No ... forget that."

Q: Right. How else? Any other way that you'll judge the success of today's class?

Tony: The kinds of issues that they bring up. The kinds of contributions by individual students ... I think we've seen some people come out of the woodwork a little bit that have been very timid...not in their writing, but in their classroom performance. Saying something, putting an idea out there.

January 18, 1:30 p.m.

The Seminar

Tony: OK, we have just ten minutes to do each one of these. We're having technical difficulties and all other kinds of good stuff. We'll start with the poem. Dennis, would you start?

Dennis: All right, one of the things I worked on last night was Terri's unnecessary necessity. I thought that the crowd and speaker might think that law was necessary and at the same time, unnecessary, because, not necessarily the crowd so much, but especially the speaker was the only one in the entire poem that realized that law was necessary and at the same time unnecessary. I think that the one paragraph that we didn't deal with, which was the eighth, was the one that --

Tony: The long one?

Dennis: Yeah. Was the one that nobody, was where the speaker dealt with it being unnecessary at the same time.

Tony: OK, let's see if I can put that as a claim, because it sounds as if you're making one. Your claim is that the speaker is the only one who realizes that the law is necessary and unnecessary.

Dennis: And maybe the crowd also, but that's a little farther away.

Tony: OK, and the place where you found that is in the long stanza?

Dennis: Yeah.

Tony: The stanza before the last.

Dennis: Yeah.

Tony: OK. Other comments about the poem? Unresolved issues? Things we need to look at?

Eric: In the last stanza where he compares love and law and comes up with similarities when he uses words like in the first line, 'where or why', second line, 'compel or fly', 'often weep, seldom keep.' I don't understand how he links those words with what he's just said. He describes everything that's happening, but I don't understand what 'compel or fly' has to do with anything that he wrote up to then.

Tony: Suppose you try to put that in a sentence. Take a shot at it. How would you do it?

Eric: Put what in a sentence?

Tony: The last four lines [of the poem].

Eric: Like love we don't know where or why; we can't tell or fly; we often weep, we seldom keep; I'd use commas.

Tony: Paraphrase. "So what?" If it were written in sentences, what would it mean? Anybody?

Michelle: Well, when I read it I just took it as he's saying nobody understands what law is and down here I feel like he's saying nobody understands what love is, but we accept that. Why can't we just accept the fact that there is no true law? Like there is no definition of love.

Tony: And why can't we just accept that?

Michelle: I don't know. 'Cause we all ... [several voices]

Tony: One at a time...Let her finish her sentence. Why can't we accept "I don't know?" as...

Michelle: Like, why can't we accept the fact that there is no true law? That everybody has their own. We seem to get down on other people because they have different laws than we have.

Tony: [To another student] You have an answer?

Patty: Sort of. Well, everybody's-- if we put mental maps into this [from semantics unit] -- We all think of each of these things of what we believe so when you believe some-

thing is something else, or your connotation of it, you don't want to believe somebody else's, right? Because you think yours is right. So maybe this is what he is pointing out, that everybody, they can't agree on one thing cause they each have their own idea and won't give it up. They've all been living by it.

Michelle: But everybody has their own idea of love, too.

Patty: Right.

Michelle: And it doesn't seem to matter to anybody.

January 18, 1989, 4:30

After seeing five classes, all of them very different in structure, I see that what ties them together is the students' role -- in each class, it is to be responsible and active. Tony gives directions and examples at the start of each class, tells students what is expected of them for the day's activity, and describes how it will help them towards the goal of the formal written interpretation. He is organizer and guide; they are interpreters and writers. His voice is noticeably absent from the actual conversations about the two pieces of literature; is it in that absence that students become interpreters? Most of them seem to feel a real ownership of the struggle to make meaning, as well as a commitment to the meaning they make.

Because students are on their own to fashion their own interpretation, because their voices are heard in class, because their questions are the ones that will be discussed, one could call this a 'student-centered' classroom. They have power in this room, as interpreters.

This parallels what I know of the first semester of Tony's course, when students learned to be writers. There is a difference between "learning how to write" (whatever that means) and being a writer, and I'm seeing the same difference during these students' encounters with literature during this project. Their serious effort stems largely, I believe, from their view that they are working, making meaning, for themselves. Empowerment is an overused term lately, but I like it anyway, and I think it describes what's happening in this class. Students are experimenting with methods, Tony's goal being that they will consciously decide how and why certain methods seem to "work" better for them. It's his structure, his pace, his activity, but their decision.

August 15, 1989

Tony says students are asked to make statements early, to get it in writing within the belief that these are only drafts, that writing a statement does not imply you are no longer uncertain. It is, instead, an attempt at, a draft of meaning-making. I find myself once again wondering what it feels like to be one student in this class -- not an observer, or interviewer, or teacher. What does it feel like to sit in one of those old desks and try, for the first time, to make some sense of "Law Like Love" and "the Book of the Grotesque"? Does it feel too structured? Too rushed? For whom? At what point? There are fourteen individual people sitting there, fourteen reading and writing styles, fourteen "levels of readiness."

Keith: Discussions get boring if they're too long. As long as new, usable, and interesting ideas come up, it's OK. Having only one day of discussion, you wanted more, but it kept it interesting. There was no time to repeat.

Keith's comment reminds me of a recent conversation with fellow researcher Ann Connolly. She reminded me that many students don't want to "stroll around" in a literary text. They call that "killing it," although we both know that that's how interpretations are realized: over time, after many looks at the work and usually much speculation. My discomfort at seeing response-based teaching put to the use of a structured lesson aimed at formal interpretation keeps bumping up against the realities of the school world. If speculation, question-raising, and thoughtful pursuit of ideas really were important to the school culture, wouldn't there be the time and structure to allow those activities to occur?

Do my friends and I write formal interpretations of the books we read? No. We talk about characters, whether they seem real or plausible, their situations and actions, their relevance to our own lives: we talk about the writing, the style, how it differs from or is the same as other books by the same writer or another; as scholars we have learned and occasionally practice other activities: we apply critical perspectives to what we read, we look for story patterns or archetypical motifs, we look for contradictions within the text, perhaps we discuss the cultural codes we find embedded in the story or the text. But do we write formal five-paragraph analyses of the work for each other? No.

January 20, 1989

Tony: If you'd asked how is literature experienced, it would have been a fundamentally different question from how is literature discussed in schools. There's a lot of difference between scientists and chemistry students. And I think the quality of the difference is the same here. When I said that [a literature classroom] was an artificial context I meant that you have to look at the givens in a literature class, and if there's no literature class, then there are no givens, there are just readers and texts; here, we have all these givens. One given is that you must be able to read and write about literature in ways that others will pick and then will grade according to their standards. It's a given, because it's a class. There will be a grade. It's a course. It's not, 'let's meet and chat about a book we read.' ... We've got to have class ranks. We have to establish differences between people. We don't care about similarities ... We want people to be spread out on a bell curve, we don't care what for. Because they are that way in height and weight, then we have to have them that way so we can decide who can go to what school and major in what and everything. Another given is that the ultimate and most important reader of your work is going to be the teacher. Because that will be the person who either puts the grade on or who decides who puts the grade on, which is the same thing.

Everything will be done and can be done in forty-minute segments, and students are going to do things with literature that are quite a bit different from what teachers and other readers of texts actually do. Maybe calling it a different context is better than

calling it artificial, but to me the part that's least real about high school is the intellectual part. We're still telling people to take geometry so you can build kitchen cabinets. If you want to build kitchen cabinets, take carpentry.

So the kinds of things we do -- I do -- for lifelong learning outside of the classroom are quite a bit different.

Q: Whose fault is that?

Tony: We need to have bureaucracies I guess. Our society believes in systematization of things. Our transmission of education -- I think that's a good word; I keep thinking of the opening of Hard Times: rows upon rows of empty vessels waiting to be filled -- and individual teachers can say, "No, I reject that," but dammit, it's still there. And I can't reject it all. I can only say, "Well, in this class, we're going to try and do this, but yes indeed, class ranking is going to be there."

Q: But tell me -- you're indicting a system --

Tony: Yeah.

Q: But tell me about yourself. Tell me about you and your place in that system. What is it and how do you define it?

Tony: That is my place right there. I want to indict the system. Because the system does not allow for empowerment --

Q: --And continue it by going along with it.

Tony: There are things that I can do and there are things that I'm not going to do, for the same reason that I'm not active in national politics, because I don't think I'm going to have any impact there. I'll be active in local politics because it's a context that I work in and that I feel like I can make some difference. I'm not going to be empowered nationally. I won't write to the President. But I'll talk to the people that run the school and try to change things as much as I can in ways that make sense to me in my own classroom. And get other people to problematize: What the hell are we doing here, anyway? Sometimes the question has to be asked just that way. Because what we've been doing has been happening for so long that people aren't even asking questions about it anymore. If they are, it's how can we do what we've always done, better. So our SAT scores will go up. I've been here twenty years now, and no one's ever asked, in a faculty meeting, or any other kind of organized meeting, what are we doing here? The discussions that we had last year on effective schools, it was all behavioral: effective schools do this, this, this, this. Nobody ever asked what the hell should a school do, in the first place. What's our product here? Is our product learning? Is our product students who have been changed in so many ways? Is our product people who know what they can do and have some abilities? That's not even an issue. And to me, it's not the only one, but it ought to be the first one. I don't think Sylvia Plath, before she put her head in the oven, made a list of the kinds of analytical writings students ought to do before they got out of high school. I don't know how she'd feel about "The Sow" making it to the AP test.

Q: But everything that I've seen happen in your classroom in terms of the lit that they're studying, is aiming them towards an analytical writing of that piece, of either one of those if not both.

Tony: Yeah, because I'm stuck with that context, but I don't want it to be the only one. I think anybody who's able to do analytical writing is able to use language to empower himself to do about what he wants to do. And if you've noticed the kind of writing that they've done, it hasn't all been analytical, and it won't be. It doesn't have so much to do with empowerment as with the limits within which empowerment is possible. There are always limits, but this is creating a really limited limit that says, forget about that stuff [the other kinds of writing]. Well, a lot of 'that stuff' is what kids want to do, people want to do, and will do, when they make their own choices.

January 21, 1989

Why do I keep hearing these voices, from the administration right on down to fellow members of my department. The litany: "They must be able to interpret literature. They must be able to write an analytic essay. They **must** be able to write an expository essay." I can teach my students to write a thesis-proof essay. It's true, it will be useful for them to know how to write one. That is, it will be useful in school. But, is **school** the measure of their worth? So many of the things we prepare them for (SATs, Regents exams, AP exams) are school-defined tasks that are the keys to insuring school-related success. That, in turn, is advertised as the key to success in the "outside" world. Because you won't be a bank president or a lawyer without a degree from the right university, which you won't get unless you learn to play the school game well. Which gives that game a kind of worth it doesn't have intrinsically while it supports a growing (and one can only assume prosperous) industry of list makers and test producers.

August 20, 1989

Tony set up a challenge for himself as large as the one he set for students. Their challenge was to read two difficult works in a short period of time and come up with something to say about them. His job was to make it possible, working within the limits of a research study which was to last seven days.

He pushed them, by the activities he designed for them, to challenge themselves, to take a stance, to make meaning. By demanding a product, which took shape through successive drafts, he pushed them beyond their initial questions and random comments to a more coherent and cohesive reading of each text.

He experimented. He used the project -- the presence of another teacher always questioning and the presence of the videocamera always watching -- to see how far student interpretation could go, given total freedom. The activities and structure of this unit were clearly defined by him, yet Tony's voice as an interpreter was just as clearly absent from any discussions with students, both inside and outside his classroom. He expressed frustration with this decision when he told me students wanted to talk with him about the works after class -- "Normally, I'd

do it" -- but he remained true to his original plan: what could students do with these literary works in a short time period, given every method that he knew and believed in.

Why would he do this? Why not pull out a showcase lesson, no surprises? Because it wouldn't be interesting, it wouldn't be a challenge. Instead, I watched him spend seven days talking out his plans and beliefs, anticipating students' readings, designing lessons to evoke the best ones, and constantly monitoring progress and revising plans for the next class, as students rose to his challenge. In this sense, we were both researchers in his classroom.

Tony's willingness, even eagerness, to participate in this project reflects once again the normal limits of school as an institution. This project was a rare event. His belief in what he called the "givens of a literature class" (time constraints, product-orientation, and limited teacher authority to make changes beyond the classroom door) are significant aspects of life as a public school teacher. Where is it that we are given any sort of time or structure to do our jobs as professionals, as people capable of making decisions about our goals, as working in a situation where reflection and speculation might be valued. I have heard more than one administrator express fear that a teacher given too much "free time" would spend it in the lounge drinking coffee or (worse crime) reading the newspaper. Never was there any suspicion that the time might be spent reading student papers, reading course materials or professional publications, working with other teachers, or simply designing more effective lessons, revising old plans, making new ones. Or maybe even working with a student. No one would think that a teacher might actually choose to do one of those things. How is it that we are called professionals in the first place? Tony's "givens" are surely there. What power do we have to ignore them or deny them or change them?

And so, while I view with irony his choice of such a formal product-oriented unit for this study, I also know that I studied a teacher admired by students because they trust him to help them succeed in the school world. They believe that he will teach them how to do what they know they will need to do. He believes that any activity they do as a class is only as good as it leads each student ultimately "to recognize that I am on my own," as he put it: of course when taking "listmakers'" tests, but also as a reader sitting alone with a book, a writer facing the blank page. He wants his students, all of them, from honors to general level, to know what to do then.

I can't help comparing (and contrasting) what I saw in Tony's class with my perceptions of my own teaching. My uneasiness at seeing a response-based method in the service of a series of lessons aimed at producing a predefined formal analysis stays with me and sits right next to my recognition of the need to teach such a form, or at least the institution's apparent belief in such a form. I recognize too, that these students produced many other kinds of writing during this unit of study: they worked with formats for responding to literary works; they defined interpretive questions or cruxes of each text; they made connections between the works; and in addition to class assignments, many of them worked on bonus assignments related to the unit, including activities such as rewriting one of the works into a different genre, or writing a dialogue between the speakers of each work. Some of those writings showed, I thought, a depth of understanding that just didn't appear in the formal essays -- or, if it did, in a manner nowhere near as compelling.

I keep bumping up against the larger question of this project: what is the role of the teacher in a literature class? I can't ignore the fact that I am also a reader in my own classroom. The communities to which student readers belong are defined in ever-widening circles -- the individual and her own experiences, the world of her peers, the classroom, social and other cultures, then perhaps that of scholarly tradition. How far outside her own circle should I try to move each of my readers? Cannot my own voice as a reader be heard? Isn't there some value in my role, too, as a questioner, a problematizer, of students' readings? Or simply as another reader in the room? These are questions I've been asking myself lately, as a teacher who believes in reader response, in student-centeredness, and yet also, in the fact that I am a more experienced reader than my students and I think what I have to offer them is worth something. When I visited Tony's class, I was reminded of the issues again, because of the absence of his voice, and that included his voice as a reader of those particular texts.

I keep reminding myself that I saw only five classes out of 180. What can I say, or even assume, really, about the other 175? It seems unfair or at least incomplete to assume much about any of them beyond the admittedly experimental classes that I saw. How can I make conclusions or generalizations about what it's like to be in that room for a year? What's fair, I guess, is that we both went into this knowing that it would be these seven classes, only, which I would see.

August 30, 1989

I've learned a great deal from Tony Carrera. Since I've known him, and now, during this project, talking to him, arguing with him have made me look at teaching with new eyes. During the seven days I spent in Tony's class, I saw what can happen when a teacher who is a reader, a writer, and a scholar challenges students to be the same: they do it. I saw his students form communities of interpreters, to create their own readings, by sharing with and challenging each other. I learned that not everyone labeled a "good" teacher practices or even believes the same things, and that many times, within one teacher's room, contradictions in those beliefs exist and thrive, side by side.

But most of all, I've learned about myself. I saw my own teaching through a new focus, a focus which challenged some of my own beliefs and practices, and strengthened my hold on others. I've thought often, during this project, of the importance of understanding contexts, of the impossibility of telling The Truth, of the ease yet the uselessness, and yes, danger, of jumping to quick conclusions about what we see or easy answers to problems we encounter. I've thought about Sherwood Anderson's grotesques. "It was the truths that made the people grotesques....The moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood."

We are making choices, always. As readers, as teachers. We need to keep asking questions, at the same time we know that there won't be a whole story. There are only voices -- some louder than others -- voices inside of us and outside. I want to hear them all and help students find a way to do that, too. That's where the danger lies, I think, not only in believing the truth of one voice, but of the many, as well.

The way I view the details of these classes, the way I hear the tapes of interviews, the way I try to make sense of the experience for myself -- all these change as my perspective does, as time does. The analysis shifts as I read new articles, consider my own classes, weigh Tony's against the tapes of other researchers, talk to Tony himself. How many details will I never even see, and what meanings have I completely missed? Classrooms, teachers, students, researchers -- all are texts; we make meaning of them through our own changing perspectives. I wonder if it doesn't finally add up to an echo of the judge in "Law Like Love": Literature class is, well, literature class. Which is, well, school.

Which voices will speak most strongly here, in this piece? That will depend, of course.